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Will the U.S. Try to Put Aquino on a Leash?

We bought him, we paid for him and now he's ours alone. The 20-year reign of Ferdinand Marcos, supported openly and often by the U.S., is over. A brilliant political strategist, he negotiated a peaceful withdrawal from the nation he misguided for so long. Whether the Philippines will be as fortunate is far from certain.

Able as he was, the proximate cause of his downfall was a clear miscalculation. Mr. Marcos called a snap election last November, appropriately enough on David Brinkley's Sunday ABC program, because he thought he could successfully suborn de-

pendent view of the proceedings provided by the U.S. media, and television in particular. Here was an election being stolen in open view, complete with goons, miscounts and stolen ballots. Whatever our own past sins in this regard, Americans do not publicly condone the practice of stealing elections and murdering opponents.

As for the observers, all but a handful defied precedent by behaving like independent auditors instead of cheerleaders for the status quo. Official delegations in the past have too often contented themselves with the role of an approving chorus, having performed that task in such disparate spots over the past 20 years as Vietnam and El Salvador. Unable to see more than a handful of polling places, they have been almost worthless in providing informed assessment. Two or three of the observers repeated that sorry history in Manila as well, returning to speak glowingly of a "working, two-party system" and comparing the national theft in the Philippines to ballot-box fraud in Chicago. But this time, balanced against their knee-jerk sycophancy was the manifest, bipartisan outrage of the large majority of the observers who knew what they had seen and heard—and knew that it was intolerable.

We may never know what, if anything, our government did to persuade Mr. Marcos to go. The central part assumed by Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, one of the truly slimy (if also brilliant) architects of the long Marcos hegemony, leads to justifiable suspicions on that score. So does the decision to defect by Gen. Fidel Ramos, the deputy chief of staff. Both have long been close to our intelligence and military communities in Manila. The mission by special ambassador Philip Habib may also have been vital.

The Reagan administration, having underwritten the past five years of the Marcos dictatorship, will now move to claim (modestly) credit for bringing it down. Not right away, of course, but soon the Philippines will be added to Washing-

ton's honor roll of nations the U.S. has helped nudge toward democracy. Given Mr. Reagan's embrace of the tyrant right up to the very end, that will be a sick joke. If anything guaranteed Mr. Marcos's downfall, it was the murder of opposition leader Benigno Aquino in 1983, just as the murder of the democratic newspaper editor Pedro Chamorro hastened the downfall of Somoza in Nicaragua in 1979.

As with Nicaragua then, the important question in the Philippines now does not involve the past, but the future. Is this to be a government of Messrs. Enrile and Ramos and, trailing along, Ms. Aquino, or of Ms. Aquino and those committed millions who have waited so long for the restoration of democracy? What, with Mr. Marcos gone, is the true strength of the Marxist insurgency? How much pro-American sentiment has been lost forever because we let Mr. Marcos stay too long? Will Ms. Aquino have the unqualified support that we gave Mr. Marcos, or will the leash be shortened to the degree that she behaves as the leader of an independent nation instead of the appointed instrument of a semi-colonial power?

It would be nice to predict that Washington will give the right answers to all of those questions in its control, but there is much to suggest it won't. The American crusade in the world, stripped of rhetoric, too often seems to be for "stability" and "order" rather than for true freedom and democracy. We helped fasten Mr. Marcos on his people because in matters of our perceived security and political interests, he was our dog, willing to point as we directed. To paraphrase George Bush, we loved Mr. Marcos's "democracy" because it provided the one essential prerequisite for U.S. friendship—slavish obedience on everything that mattered to us. Democracy was not one of those things. If that remains true, Corazon Aquino and our real interests in the Philippines are in for a rough, tough and finally disastrous future.

Viewpoint

by Hodding Carter III

democracy one more time. He did not seem to understand the depth of popular hostility on the one hand or the political skills of Corazon Aquino on the other.

What he also could not anticipate was the Reagan administration's decision to cut bait in the wake of his blatant theft of the election. He could hardly have expected that his friend, Ronald Reagan, would turn away in his time of need.

And, for a short but embarrassing period, the president seemed to validate that faith. While all but the most supine of Marcos toadies were calling the election what it was, a cruel betrayal of the peoples' mandate, the president was engaging in his favorite exercise—equating the obvious violence on the government side with a balanced, if mythical, level of comparable violence on the other. It was an exercise so simple-mindedly wrong and so transparently stupid that not even the White House could sustain it for long.

That the administration could not hold back the tide was due in large part to the independence of most of the election observers, official and unofficial, and the in-